

Marshfield Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

Public Forum

6:00 p.m. • Thursday, May 19, 2016 • Old School House Common

Members present: Jon Groveman, Michael Schumacher, Melissa Seifert, Bob Light, and Ivan Shadis. Member absent: Faeterri Silver.

Guests present: Brett Engstrom, Anne Miller, Andrew Perchlik, Rachel Rudi, Barbara Bendix, Sara Norton, Victoria Hudson, Rich Phillipos, Chris Martin, Bob Popp, Bruce Cows, Dina Bookmyer-Baker, Rich Baker, Susan Green, Bonnie Waninger, and Dan Currier. Also present: Barbara Burkhalter (recording secretary).

The forum started at 6:11 p.m.

1. Welcome

Jon welcomed the guests and gave a summary outlining the purpose of the forum and the Town Plan. The zoning was first adopted in the 1970's; it has been altered since then, but the core of it has remained. There are four land use districts in the Town of Marshfield: Forestry and Conservation, Agricultural and Rural Residential, Village, and Flood Hazard, and there are different zoning requirements in these districts. For example, commercial and residential development are both allowed in the Rural Residential district and camps and Planned Use Developments (PUD) are allowed in Forestry & Conservation. Dimensional requirements are the main regulations in all zoning districts. When the Planning Commission (PC, Commission) has held meetings, or conducted surveys, the issue they heard most about was the Forest and Conservation District Boundary. The Commission has become concerned that the current district boundaries – not just the forestry district boundary – and regulations may not be meeting the goals of the Town Plan, or the needs and desires of the Town based on the survey the Commission conducted and the Town Plan. Are the districts in our town working the way we want? Jon explained that this will be a long term process, there will be more meetings seeking more input from the public. The changes will be based on the Town Plan, input from the townspeople and data and mapping that didn't exist when the zoning was first created. The Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) has been an invaluable resource for the Commission in helping create and interpret maps to help determine how well the current zoning is serving the Town.

2. The Town Plan

The Town Plan is the foundation that zoning is built on, sets the vision for development in Town and it identifies the principles that should guide the zoning. It was last updated in 2012 and included data from the census. Its key principle is protecting rural character. Town Plan's must be updated every 8 years (the law recently changed this from 5 years) and must be up to date in order to change the zoning regulations. The following are the key principles in the Town Plan that guide our thinking about whether the zoning is achieving the vision for growth in Marshfield:

- To protect and preserve the integrity and function of Marshfield's important natural resources, environmentally sensitive areas, and historic features.
- Promote and maintain a transportation system which is safe and efficient for vehicles and pedestrians, enhances the economic vitality of village areas, and preserves the quality of Marshfield's environment.
- To promote awareness of the opportunities for renewable energy sources, and the conservation of energy resources.
- To encourage housing development/redevelopment consistent with the Town's desire that residents have a safe and affordable place to live.
- To stimulate appropriate economic development and provide opportunities for individuals to establish locally-based business ventures, while maintaining high environmental standards.
- To maintain the rural character of the community as defined by its traditional village areas, open spaces and forested hills, as well as the human activities thereon.

3. 2014 Survey

Melissa gave a summary of the survey, which the PC conducted in 2014 to find out what matters most to people in Town about development, growth and the direction of the zoning. The survey was mailed to all the households on the Grand List and voter registration list; 72 out of 830 were turned in.

The following is a very condensed version of the results of the survey. For a more comprehensive look at the survey and its results please go to the Town of Marshfield's website

http://www.town.marshfield.vt.us/index.asp?SEC=C4283BAA-77B7-4D96-A84C-EAD00B7CEBC2&Type=B_BASIC

- 65 of the 72 respondents are residents of Marshfield.
- Most have lived in town under 30 years
- Most have property in the Rural Residential/Agricultural district.
- What respondents like best about where they live: good neighbors, community, few neighbors, privacy, beauty, forest, open fields, good roads and road crew
- Described Rural Character As: farms, gardens, agriculture, food, animals, active working landscape, woods, forest, wildlife, wilderness, open land, fields, nature, low density, little development, little traffic, dirt roads, quiet, peaceful, private, small village, small town, local economy, community
- Would like to see the following development in Village: restaurant, pub, affordable groceries, small business, local services, bank, hardware store, elder housing, crosswalks, sidewalks
- Most respondents were 'not much' or 'a little familiar' with the Marshfield Zoning Regulations. The following are results from the questions regarding our current Zoning:
 - When asked if they would like to see the current 600' set back typical Agricultural and rural Residential (buildable) Zone changed most respondents said they wanted an increase in the distance. However, we realized this question was a bit confusing.
 - Most would like to separate Agricultural from Rural Residential zone.
 - Most feel the current zoning/subdivision system is fine or needs work.
 - Most disagree that Marshfield should repeal zoning.
 - Most agree that wetlands and significant wildlife habitats should be protected
 - Most agree that historic structures should be preserved
 - Many agree that there should be incentives to encourage agricultural use of farmland
 - Many agree that affordable housing should be encouraged

4. Information about zoning

Bob gave a presentation on the history of zoning in the Town of Marshfield. In 1969 the Commission drew up temporary regulations of land development. There was no talk of zoning in the 1970 annual report. In 1971 the Commission found the basis of the Town Plan and the need to develop and from that they drew up the zoning ordinances, which reflected the people and needs of the town. Also in 1971, they drew up the first Town Plan, but it was not adopted until 1972 and it covers the same things we talk about today. In 1973 there were 12 members, all long-term residents, who worked on the subdivision and PUD regulations. In 1974 they performed a study on flood plain regulations, and in 1979-1980, they set the Forestry and Conservation district to 600' from the center of the roads (uniform setback from all the roads). From 1972 to 2016 there have been many changes, but the regulations have basically stayed the same.

5. Mapping Information - What Resources are in our zoning districts – Pictures of rural character

Dan Curreier from the CVRPC spoke about the atlas available online from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (VT ANR) and the different data layers available, such as: slope, built land, conserved lands, landscape connectivity, rare, threatened and endangered species, prime agricultural soils, farms, wetlands, land cover (forests, open space/fields), roads.

Looking at these data layers will aid with the Commission's decisions about the zoning regulations and how to make it more fair for all the landowners in town. What are the needs of the town today? What things do we value and want to protect? Use the tools we have today to zone smarter.

Input from the guests:

- Ag land development – keeping ag soils vs. keeping farming
- Data depth – do we have enough?
- Rural character:
 - Bickford farm
 - Farms with distant forest views
 - Babbling brooks, dirt roads, being able to see the stars
 - Old houses and barns
 - Houses out of line of viewshed
 - Low/no traffic
 - Coyotes and wildlife
 - Aloneness is near
- Favorite Places/Roads:
 - Upper Depot
 - Hollister Hill bend towards Light's farm
 - Mimi Arnstein's farm (looks like a PUD – houses near together with shared area)
- Examples of Development that do not represent Rural Character:
 - Maplefields
 - Drainage water coming off of development into town ROW
 - Service vehicles to additional houses
 - Amount of traffic on dirt roads
- Want:
 - Small cluster of houses with openness around it
 - Reduce energy use through zoning
 - Needs for people and wildlife
 - Cottage industry development locations vs. home business vs. light industry
 - Use existing infrastructure
 - Groundwater

The next public forum will be held on June 16th.

The forum was adjourned at 8:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara S. Burkhalter

Final

Approved June 16, 2016